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# Municipal Slaughterhouses.

DECEMBER, 1899.

It is a remarkable fact that while in most respects the sanitary code in this country is considerably in advance of those of the Continental nations, yet in the matter of meat inspection we are very far behind them.

Dr. Morison Legge, the Secretary to the Royal Commission on Tuberculosis, in his work on *Public Health in European Capitals*, says that in regard to meat-inspection "Great Britain is at least twenty years behind France, Germany, Belgium and Denmark."

## Importance of Meat Inspection.

For the protection of public health it is of the utmost importance that all meat intended for human consumption should be examined and approved by a skilled inspector. Many diseases are caused by the consumption of unsound meat. Meat that has begun to putrefy is capable of causing acute, and often fatal, sickness and diarrhœa. Tapeworms, trichinosis, anthrax, tuberculosis and other diseases may be acquired by eating the flesh of animals that have suffered from those complaints, some of which are by no means uncommon. Tuberculosis is especially prevalent. It was found that 27 per cent. of the animals slaughtered in Saxony in 1895 were suffering from this disease. Mr. King, Veterinary Inspector to the Manchester Corporation (quoted in Legge and Sessions' *Cattle Tuberculosis*), states that at the slaughterhouse in that city 41 per cent. of the cows, 22 per cent. of the heifers, 25 per cent. of the bulls, and 16 per cent. of the bullocks were found to be infected with tuberculosis. It has been proved that this dreadful disease—which is responsible for one-seventh of our mortality, and last year killed 60,000 persons in England and Wales—may be acquired by eating the flesh of tuberculous animals. The Jews are required by their religious ritual to inspect meat with special care, and much is rejected by them. It is well known that they are freer from tuberculosis than their Gentile neighbors.

That this danger is real and ever present is proved by occasional disclosures concerning the seizure of tubs full of putrid livers destined for the manufacture of sinister "breakfast delicacies," or cow-beef containing "tuberculous deposits in some places as large as a small walnut."\* These casual horrors are, however, soon forgotten, and the consumption of diseased meat goes on unchecked.

\* *Meat Trades Journal*, July 4, 1899.

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## How can we Protect Ourselves from Diseased Meat?

In Germany, France and most civilized countries, slaughtering takes place at stated hours in large public slaughterhouses and all the meat is examined by highly trained inspectors, nearly all of whom are qualified veterinary surgeons. In this country the animals are killed in small private slaughterhouses, usually situated behind the butcher's shop. These slaughterhouses are very numerous. In London, for example, there were in 1897 no less than 470, and the number in smaller places is proportionally much greater; Sheffield, with a population of 356,000, contains 190 private slaughterhouses. The establishments are scattered over the town, no stated hours for slaughtering are observed, and the so-called inspectors are nearly always persons who have had no special training for their work. According to the Report of the Royal Commission on Tuberculosis: "In Battersea, for instance, four plumbers and three carpenters discharge the office of meat-inspectors; in Hackney the duties have been committed to two plumbers, one carpenter, one compositor, one bricklayer, one florist, one builder, one surveyor, and one stonemason. In Portsmouth a solitary butcher has received as colleagues three school-teachers, one medical dispenser, one carpenter, and one tram-conductor."

It is obvious that the task of efficiently inspecting a large number of scattered private slaughterhouses where slaughtering may take place at any time is one of extreme difficulty and would require a large and expensive staff of specially trained officials. But in the large municipal slaughterhouse, with slaughtering carried on at fixed hours, meat inspection becomes a comparatively simple business.

The Royal Commission on Tuberculosis reported that "the use of public slaughterhouses in populous places, to the exclusion of all private ones, is a necessary preliminary to a uniform and equitable system of meat inspection." This, important as it is, would not be the only advantage arising from the supersession of private establishments by public slaughterhouses. There are many other

### Advantages of Municipal Slaughterhouses.

Many of our private slaughterhouses are in so insanitary a condition that the meat is exposed to foul emanations from drains, decomposing blood, offal, etc. They may easily become a source of grave danger to the surrounding districts. In municipal slaughterhouses, on the other hand, the buildings are specially designed for their purpose; they are kept in good sanitary condition, and the meat is therefore not subject to deterioration. The concentration of the business of slaughtering in one large establishment removes many sources of nuisance from the neighborhood of dwelling-houses, and by placing the building near a railway station, the driving of weary and exhausted cattle through the streets would be avoided and the street danger to the public would be lessened. On humanitarian grounds the superiority of municipal slaughterhouses is obvious. The closed doors of private slaughterhouses must hide many a pitiful

scene of clumsy cruelty. In our public establishments we could insist that none but skilled persons should be employed in the work of killing, and that only the most improved appliances, such as the Greener method, should be used.

German experience has shown the disadvantage arising from even the slightest modification of the municipal slaughterhouse system. In the Berlin slaughterhouses separate chambers are provided for each butcher who desires to rent one ; but this in practice has been found to militate against the inspection of meat, and hence in slaughterhouses more recently constructed the butchers slaughter in common halls, paying fees for the use of the premises. Osthoff (*Handbuch der Hygiene*, Vol. VI.), in considering the cost of the use of public slaughterhouses, and of the inspection of the meat in relation to the cost of the meat, estimates the additional cost due to these causes as amounting to about half-a-farthing per pound of meat. The German public slaughterhouses are in all cases self-supporting. The six municipal slaughterhouses of Paris cost the city £680,000, and as far back as 1851 they were stated to be yielding an interest of  $6\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. per annum upon the outlay.

### Provincial Experience.

By section 169 of the Public Health Act of 1875 any urban sanitary authority has the power to provide a public slaughterhouse, and the system is already in operation in fifty towns in the United Kingdom, and others, as Rochdale, in September, 1899, and Yarmouth in October, 1899, are adopting the same plan. In some cases, as, for example, Glasgow and Manchester, the system has proved a financial success ; in others, it has entailed some charge upon the rates. It must, however, be remembered that local success or failure depends largely upon the butchers, who may decide to use the municipal slaughterhouse, but cannot be compelled to do so. It is therefore not sufficient to provide the municipal slaughterhouse, we must also

### Abolish the Private Slaughterhouses.

Many towns in England, Wales and Ireland have provided slaughterhouses, but (apart from a few exceptional instances) they have no power to abolish those under private control except in case of flagrant violation of the law. Dublin has erected a fine public slaughterhouse, but few butchers use it. They prefer the private slaughterhouses where practically the carcasses are not inspected and could not be without a large staff of inspectors. In Germany, when the town council has erected a public slaughterhouse, it may issue an order prohibiting the slaughtering of animals in the district except at the public slaughterhouse. In Scotland, a municipality has the power to declare that when a public slaughterhouse has been provided, no other place shall be used for slaughtering, except for a period of three years in the case of existing registered slaughterhouses. Scotch town councils should be urged to use this power, which, according to the recommendation of the Royal Commission on



Tuberculosis, should be extended to all towns in England, Wales and Ireland. English town councils should be urged to petition Parliament for legislation to this effect, and should meanwhile provide a public slaughterhouse.

The establishment of public slaughterhouses, and the abolition of private ones, are measures that have received the strong support of the medical profession in this country. At the meeting of the British Medical Association, in August 1899, the State Medicine Section unanimously supported Dr. Manby, the Assistant Medical Officer of Health of Liverpool, who read a paper strongly advocating the municipal slaughterhouse and the abolition of the private slaughterhouse. Our leading writers on public health are unanimous on this subject. It will suffice to quote Sir Richard Thorne Thorne, the Medical Officer to the Local Government Board: "Public slaughterhouses, officered by skilled inspectors, and supervised by medical officers of health, are urgently required, amongst other reasons, for the prevention of tuberculosis in man." "... the properly administered public slaughterhouse is demanded as an act of justice to those trading in meat; it is demanded in the interests of public health and of decency; it is demanded for the prevention of cruelty to the lower animals, and it is demanded to bring England—if not the United Kingdom—somewhat nearer to the level of other civilized nations in this matter."

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